

AMHERST HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Fiscal Year 2013

There were many highlights in FY 13 for the Human Rights Commission.

The Chair participated in the search process for a new Director of Human Resources and Human Rights, who began working for the Town on July 16th. In September, a part time Human Rights Coordinator was hired for the balance of the fiscal year to provide direct support for the Commission's work.

The Commission's mission to increase its visibility was enhanced by its Facebook presence and Human Rights Commission blog on the Town intranet. The Commission held 9 public meetings throughout the fiscal year. Halfway through the year, longtime Chair Reynolds Winslow relocated out of Amherst and relinquished his seat on the Commission. Greg Bascomb was elected Chair by his colleagues. For the first time in memory, all 9 seats on the Commission were filled, complete with representation from both the high school and university communities. During the year, the parameters of the Open Meeting Law, Conflict of Interest laws and the Amherst Appointed Committee Handbook were discussed and understood by the Commission. Concern for the lack of a dedicated budget for the Commission in light of the renewed energy and enthusiasm of its members led to a meeting with the Town Manager in April to explore ways of increasing collaborations and leveraging existing relationships with other community organizations. This remains an ongoing concern for the HRC.

The Director reviewed or investigated and responded to 6 inquiries or complaints brought to her attention during the year.

Much of the Commission's work occurred at its numerous events:

On December 9, the Commission and Amnesty International co sponsored a Human Rights Day Forum with guest speakers and musicians at the Jones Library.

On December 10, the Commission held a candlelight vigil on the North Common and participated in a community reading of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, originally adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations 65 years earlier in 1948.

2013 began with ringing of the bells in churches throughout Town and a gathering of 100 or so residents on the steps of Town Hall to celebrate and pay respect to the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. Longtime resident and retired Amherst College Professor Robert Romer shared the greetings of Governor Deval Patrick, who declared January 1, 2013 as Emancipation Proclamation Day in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Proclamation urged all the Citizens of the Commonwealth to take cognizance of this event and participate fittingly in its observance. The Proclamation further acknowledges the contributions of the 54th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry comprised of African American troops, whose assault on Fort Wagner in July 1863 did much to advance the abolitionist cause. Approximately 25 local African Americans enlisted in the Union Army through the Amherst portal, including

several who served in the 54th regiment. Professor Romer and Select Board Chair Stephanie O’Keeffe led the assembly in a reading of the Proclamation.

The Commission paid tribute to Black History Month throughout the month of February. On the 16th the Commission produced BHM Paint the Town, collaborating with downtown businesses and local artists to paint storefront windows with scenes commemorating African American achievements. The Commission also produced and promoted “BHM-Unplugged”, an evening of spoken word, song and poetry on February 21st by young African American artists, held to a sizable crowd in the Town Hall.

In March and April, the Commission occupied itself with identifying and prioritizing its major activities of interest to individual members, with the goal of establishing a predictable series of annual events and programs that can be planned and budgeted.

The Commission’s work for the year concluded on June 19, with its annual Youth and Elder Heroism Awards and Picnic occurring during the Start of Summer Community Block Party on the Town Common. Receiving awards this year will be ARHS graduating Seniors Zihui Adams, Dominik Doemer, Regina East and James Kirwin; ARHS students Benjamin Thiessen and Xaq Kruezer-Land; Crocker Farm students Wesley Killough-Hill, Daudy Guerrero and Eva Ross-Perkins; and Fort River Elementary School students Jenna and April Schilling. Also receiving an award was community Elder and retiring Human Rights Commissioner Reynolds Winslow. All winners received a framed Certificate and a glass globe and pedestal from The Blue Marble.

Greg Bascomb, Chair
Lois Raj
Kathleen Anderson
Carol Ross
Ingrid Askew
Emily Jung
Liam Brodigan
Damon Mallory
Sid Ferreira